

AGENDA ITEM III A
PROPOSED ACADEMIC PROGRAM
NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY
B.A. IN COMMUNICATION

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Northwestern State University (NSU) is proposing the creation of a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Communication to be implemented immediately. At its meeting of February 22, 2007, the Board of Regents approved the Letter of Intent for this program when it acted as follows:

On motion of Regent Brame, seconded by Regent D'Aquin, the Board voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee to approve the proposed Letter of Intent for the projected B.A. program in Professional Communication¹ (CIP Code 23.1001) at Northwestern State University. Any forthcoming proposal submitted as a result of this Letter of Intent shall address concerns expressed in the staff summary.

On June 26, 2008, the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System then approved the full program proposal. Regents' staff then received the program proposal and sent it to three in-state institutions offering similar degrees to evaluate the proposal based on projected need and quality. Their responses were received during the months of August and September 2008.

Staff notes that the University currently offers the B.A. in English with a minor in Communication, and a Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.) degree with a concentration in Communication. The University notes that if the proposed program is approved, it will terminate the B.G.S. Communication concentration, while maintaining the Communication minor in its English degree.

¹ Staff notes that the Letter of Intent approved by the Regents and the full program proposal approved by the UL Board of Supervisors refer to this degree as "Professional Communication." After the full program proposal review by in-state institutions, it was suggested that the name of the degree be changed to "Communication." The University concurred with this recommendation in September 2008 albeit by that time all materials printed by the University referred to the degree as "Professional Communication." Throughout this staff summary, we note the two degree titles to be interchangeable; however, we recommend that the program be conditionally approved as a B.A. in Communication.

STAFF ANALYSIS

1. Program Description/Objectives

The proposal notes the following:

As part of the mission to enhance economic development and to educate the residents of the region, NSU proposes to develop a Professional Communication degree that will promote economic development; offer a catalyst to improve the quality of healthcare while promoting reductions in the cost of health care; and expand courses offered in the Speech Education curriculum and courses currently offered to students seeking a minor in Communication to promote Rhetoric as the historical evolution of the relationship between thought and expression.

This proposal is grounded in the research of scholars and orators such as Walter Hines Page who stated the following in “Right use of Speech in a Democracy”:

Whenever we can have running through the whole mass of popular culture the instinctive feeling that language is a sacred thing, and that for his use of it every human being will be held accountable by society--then we shall reach a higher level of true civilization than any other people in history has reached.

Effective communication is a part of the fiber of the nation, state and region. The intent of this program is to address communication competencies that, when learned, advance our business climate, improve healthcare, and support open and civil debate of the issues of the day thereby enhancing critical thinking.

The proposed degree program will allow students to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Professional Communication with concentrations in Organizational Communication, Health Communication, and Rhetoric. The Organizational Communication concentration exists at both Southeastern Louisiana University and University of Louisiana – Lafayette, but it is not available in the northern part of the State. The Health Communication curriculum will be a unique undergraduate program within the State of Louisiana. The concentration in Rhetoric will make it the one concentration of its kind in Louisiana outside of the one established at Louisiana State University – Baton Rouge. The Northwestern State University Department of Language and Communication would offer both the Rhetoric and Health Communication concentrations through on-campus courses. In addition, the Department anticipates offering the Organizational Communication concentration via a combination of on-campus and on-line courses; eventually, this degree might be available through electronic delivery.

The proposed curriculum totals 122 credit hours, including 44 credit hours for the university core, 21 credit hours for the Professional Communication core, 24 credit hours for the concentration and electives, and 33 credit hours of electives.

2. Program Need

With regard to need, the University states the following in its proposal:

Until the mid-1980s, a program in Speech Communication existed as a part of the Department of Speech and Journalism. When the Department of Journalism was created due to accrediting requirements, the Speech Communication Degree moved under the Department of Language and Communication as did its faculty. During the late 1980s, Northwestern State University experienced a financial downturn and declared exigency. During this time, many speech faculty members' contracts were not renewed. Hence, the program ultimately was discontinued due to low completion rates. In the years prior to exigency, the program thrived and was popular with students. The loss of qualified faculty led to the deletion of the program. A Speech Communication concentration was added to the Bachelor of General Studies degree in 2000; however, few students chose to pursue this concentration, and in 2004, the concentration was deleted. In 2006, the concentration was revitalized; however, no students chose to pursue this concentration. In a survey conducted among students in Fall 2007, they indicated that they would rather pursue a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication than a Bachelor of General Studies with a concentration in Communication. Interest in the Communication minor has grown since 2004, and currently, the Department has thirty-five Communication minors. The Department's Fall 2007 survey of students taking our Communication courses demonstrated their preference for a degree in Professional Communication rather than a General Studies degree (survey results are discussed in detail in the last paragraph of this section of the Staff Summary).

As noted by staff when the Letter of Intent was approved by the Board in February 2007, duplication is not a relevant issue given that a baccalaureate program in Communication is considered to be an essential core offering for any four-year institution of higher education. While a degree of this nature is offered by most in-state institutions, the degree nomenclatures vary tremendously – “Communication,” “Mass Communication,” “Speech,” “Speech Communications,” etc.

At the Letter of Intent stage, the Board directed the University to address the following question in its forthcoming, full program proposal also with regard to need:

Considering that a previous similar program suffered from low completions, what are the University plans to ensure that this projected program will not suffer the same fate?

The University responded:

The Department and NSU are committed to the expansion of this program. When the degree was offered previously, many faculty members were not replaced during a period of financial exigency during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Prior to the period leading up to exigency, the program had both an undergraduate and a graduate program in Speech. This lack of faculty limited the classes which could be offered and adversely

impacted the program. Operating as it has during the past ten years, the Department of Language and Communication has gradually rebuilt the numbers of its Communication faculty, and we do not foresee a decline in enrollment nor in faculty numbers. We believe the emphasis our proposed program places on health communication and organizational communication will position us for future success, since these are emerging programs in the field of communication at colleges and universities around the nation. To further increase completion and retention, an array of scholarly and extracurricular activities will be available for Communication majors, and we look forward to producing many majors in the new degree program.

As referenced in the initial paragraph of this section, the University surveyed students in introductory communication courses at the institution to determine interest in the proposed program. Of 217 respondents to the survey, 64 of them (29.5%) agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed that they would be interested in a Communication major at the University. At the same time, just over one-half of the respondents (112 of the 217 respondents, or 51.6%) stated that they would prefer to graduate with a major in their respective field as opposed to a minor or concentration.

3. Students

In its documentation, the University contends that a substantial number of students from the Communication minor (B.A. in English) and the Communication concentration (B.G.S.) will choose to enroll in the new program, if it is granted approval. Enrollment projections submitted by the University are as follows:

Year	Projected Enrollment	Projected Number of Graduates
2008-2009	10	5
2009-2010	15	10
2010-2011	22	15
2011-2012	29	20
2012-2013	35	25

At these rates, staff notes that proposed program would meet Board of Regents' productivity/ viability standards if subject to such a review.

4. Faculty

The University indicated that there are six (6) full-time faculty members who would be directly involved in the proposed program – one is a full professor, three are at the assistant professor level, and two are instructors. The University attests that it will need to hire (by the end of the first year of the program) an additional faculty member to staff the program at either the assistant

or associate professor level. The University has initiated a fundraising drive to raise funds for an Endowed Professorship to support this program. Until the goal of the fundraising drive is reached, the salary of the new faculty member for this program would be paid out of the existing University budget.

Two of the three in-state institutions reviewing the proposed degree stated that in order for the program to thrive and succeed, the University will need to hire at least two additional full-time faculty. Staff is in agreement with the University that an additional hire will need to occur by end-of-year one; however, at that time, the University should assess staffing needs for the program and determine whether or not the second hire is warranted.

5. Library Resources

The institution contends in its proposal that current library holdings in Communication are adequate to initiate the proposed program. The proposal notes that updates of books and resources for the program will be necessary; however, it is anticipated that the estimated costs for new library materials will not exceed \$5,000.00 for the first five years of the program.

6. Facilities

The University purports that it has sufficient classroom space for the program in existing buildings on campus.

7. Administration

The Bachelor of Arts in Communication will exist in the Department of Language and Communication within the College of Liberal Arts. Each proposed concentration within the degree (Rhetoric and Public Address, Health Communication, and Organizational Communication) will have a program coordinator who are currently serving as faculty at the University.

8. Accreditation

There are no specialized accrediting bodies for Communication degree programs.

9. Costs

Additional costs for the proposed program are as follows:

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Faculty Salaries and Benefits	\$62,000	\$62,000	\$63,000	\$64,000	\$65,000
Travel	\$700	\$700	\$700	\$700	\$700
Total	\$62,700	\$62,700	\$63,700	\$64,700	\$65,700

The proposal states that 100% of all costs will be covered through reallocation of existing state appropriations and funds from the NSU Foundation.

STAFF SUMMARY

The staff notes that Communication is considered a core academic offering of any four-year institution of higher education, and the addition of the proposed program would indeed compliment the current offerings by the University. As one reviewing in-state institution commented with regard to need for the proposed program:

A need for a B.A. in Communication does exist, particularly in the northern part of the state. Communication is a growing and vibrant field throughout the nation and the state. Although other Louisiana universities offer similar degrees (LSU, Southeastern), north Louisiana is underserved in this area. The proposal establishes that a need exists.

Staff concurs with this observation and notes that the University has presented a well-justified and well-conceived proposal to establish a separate and distinct B.A. program in Communication. Their request for immediate approval is reasonable, but a stipulation should be added requiring reassessment of faculty needs after the appointment of another full-time Communication faculty member by the beginning of AY 2009-2010. Also, as this is a new degree program, monitoring of student numbers and placement of graduates would be appropriate. As such, the staff recommends conditional approval with an annual progress report due August 1, 2009, and on that date annually thereafter, addressing the aforementioned issues. Lastly, staff notes that with this approval the concomitant termination of the B.G.S. (Communication concentration) is appropriate.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant conditional approval for the proposed Bachelor of Arts in Communication degree program (CIP Code 23.1001) at Northwestern State University, effective immediately.

By August 1, 2009, and on that date annually thereafter until otherwise indicated, the University shall submit a progress report to the Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs addressing the following:

1. *The hiring of an additional, full-time Communication faculty member for Fall, 2009;*
2. *An assessment of future program faculty needs; and*
3. *Numbers of program enrollees/completers, and placement of graduates.*

With implementation of this program, the Communication concentration in the existing Bachelor of General Studies program is hereby terminated.